



New England Agricultural Statistics Service

a field office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service
United States Department of Agriculture

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MAINE POTATOES DUG TO MEASURE YIELD, SIZE AND GRADE

Now that Maine's 2001 potato crop is planted, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is gearing up to provide the first forecast of potato production for the upcoming crop. One of the major inputs to the forecast is obtained from the annual Potato Objective Yield Survey, which is conducted in seven major potato-producing states across the country. In Maine, the study is administered by the New England field office of USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service.

The information collected is used to set official USDA statistics of fall potato acreage and production for the 2001 crop. In Maine and Idaho, another important use of the data is to generate a **Size and Grade Report** which provides crop information by type or variety for tuber size, grade (U.S. Number 1, 2, and culls) and hill counts, as well as hills per acre.

In Maine, local interviewers will be contacting about 75 farmers to gather information from 170 potato fields across the state. Farmers selected for this study are notified by letter asking for their help in this important project. The cooperation of potato farmers is essential to ensure that Maine's crop is accurately represented in national potato production statistics.

Since the objective yield survey is designed to measure production, enumerator visits are timed as close to harvest as possible. Interviewers contact farmers before harvest to collect preliminary information and request permission to harvest three hills from each of two randomly selected plots in each sample field. These potatoes are graded, sized and weighed using strict laboratory procedures. After harvest, one-fourth of the sampled fields are revisited to measure harvest losses. As with all surveys conducted by the National Agricultural Statistics Service, individual operator information is kept strictly confidential and is even exempt from requests under the Freedom of Information Act. The individual reports are only used in combination to establish state and national statistics.

The first national production forecast is printed in the **Crop Production Report** from Washington, D.C. on November 9, and the final forecast is published on December 11; both reports are released at 8:30 a.m. All reports are available on the Internet within minutes of the scheduled release time. A brief summary of Maine statistics is then reprinted in the November and December issues of the **Ag Review** (a monthly newsletter from the Concord field office). The **Maine Potato Size and Grade Report** is published in early January.

[The New England Agricultural Statistics Service is a field office of USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service. Located in Concord, New Hampshire, it is responsible for agricultural statistics in all six states in the region. The office can be reached at 1-800-642-9567 or through E-mail at nass-nh@nass.usda.gov. All national statistics and state level newsletters are available free from E-mail subscriptions and on the Internet at <http://www.usda.gov/nass/>.]

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